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TILES HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED.

BY CARYL COLEMAN.

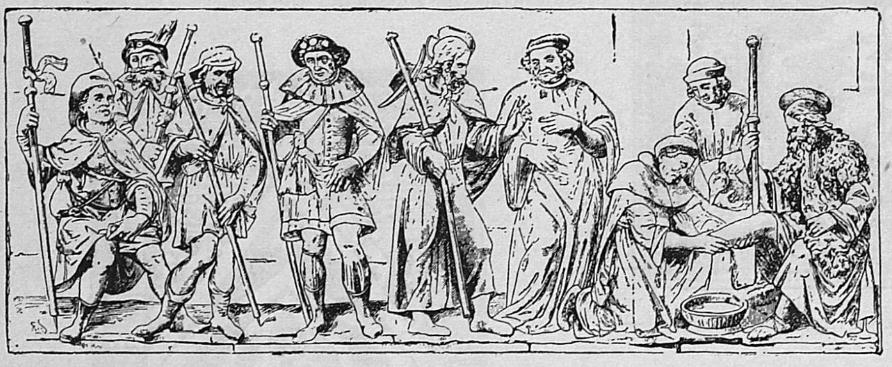
PART II., CONCLUDED.

LUCA DELLA ROBBIA.

As the Saracens not only introduced tiles and the art of making them into Spain, but into the Balearic Islands, Sicily, and Apulia as well, it is from these sources that the Italian tile maker drew his knowledge. However, the art did not attain any high point nor were there any tiles produced in Italy until the coming of the king of all tile makers, Luca della Robbia, the first and the greatest of a long line of potters.

He was born about 1400 in the city of Florence, in the Via Sant Egidio. Apprenticed at an early age to a goldsmith, with whom he first learned to model in wax and then in clay, but his "spirit," Vasari says, "growing stronger," he worked in bronze and marble, and finally he covered his clay models with a stanniferous glaze, inventing a new art that almost at once made him famous. He executed his first tile about 1438, a representation of the Resurrection, in relief, a white enamel upon a blue ground.

A short time afterward orders for his work came in so fast not only from Italy, but also from France and Spain, that he took into partnership the brothers Duccio and his own nephew and successor, Andrea, who modeled a very beautiful frieze of the seven works of mercy for the hospital "Del Ceppo," at Pistoja. The great Luca died in 1481, leaving his invention to his nephew and his nephew's sons, who carried on his art both in Italy and France.



A DELLA ROBBIA FRIEZE.

The tile work of the della Robbias was very extensive and very beautiful, the most noted are the vaulting and pavement of Pietro de Medici conservatory; the walls, chimney-pieces, etc., of Château de Madrid in Bois de Boulogne, which was sold during the first French Revolution and the della Robbia work ground down for cement; the pavement of the Loggio of the Vatican with the design in three or four colors upon a white face; the painted tile tomb of Benozzo Federihi; the lunette over a door in the "Opera del Duomo" in Florence.

Tileries were established in various parts of Italy where work like that of the della Robbia was turned out, and almost at once tiles came into general use and have held their own from that time to this, more especially in Central and Southern Italy.

The common Italian tile combines great durability with elegance and variety of pattern. Within the lifetime of Luca metallic pigments were applied to tiles, the potteries of Pesaro and Gubbio produced those painted with the pearly, the golden and the ruby lustre colors of the greatest perfection and used with wonderful skill.

The discovery and use of tin enamel glazing in Italy has often been ascribed to Luca; this opinion is, however, erroneous, and was based on insufficient knowledge of early Italian pottery. That della Robbia did improve the enamel cannot be doubted, as his was whiter and of greater opacity than any in use at the time, but his true glory is in the application of it to relief work.

Two hundred years before this Italians used tin enamels, and they were in use among the Germans, who obtained them from Asia through the neighboring nations to the East and South of them. In 1207 a tile frieze was made for the convent of St. Paul at Leipsic, the tiles were in relief and glazed with a rich tin glaze.

The Germans soon found many new ways of using tiles—building tombs, pulpits, and stoves of them, and employed them not only for exterior and interior decoration, but even built the spire of the principal church at Luneburg of perforated tiles, and with the same kind a large church screen at Brandenburg glazed in a rich green color. Their tile stoves of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were magnificent triumphs of the ceramic art. They were made very large, with seats on three sides or to one side an armchair of earthenware.

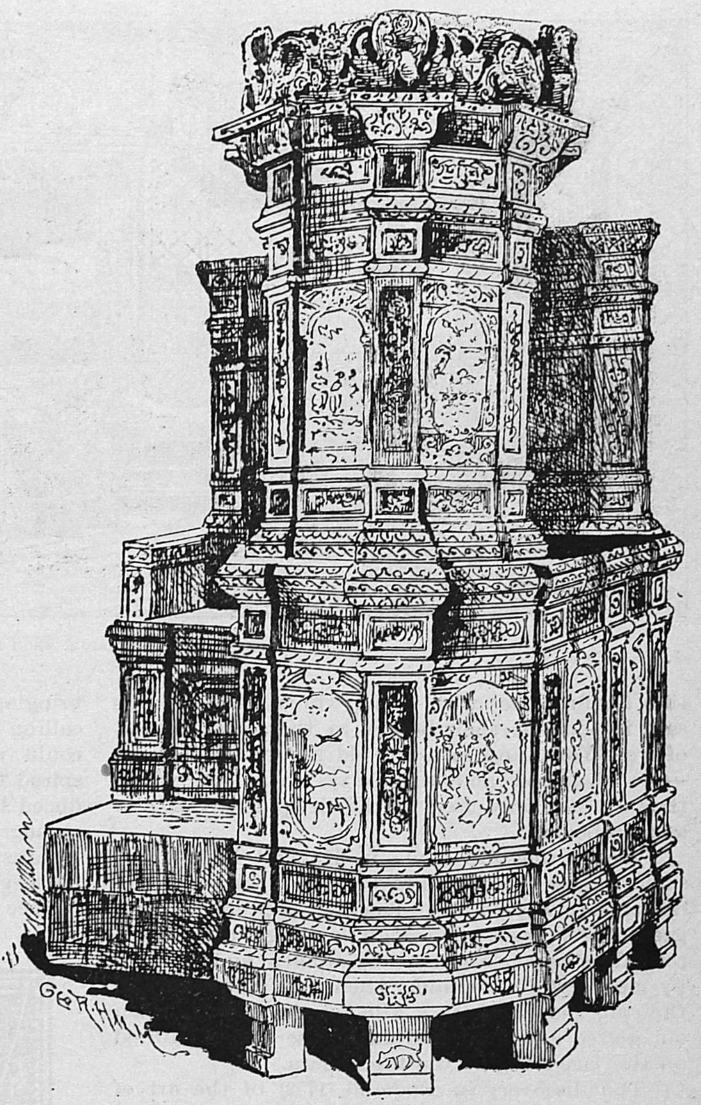
At first the stoves were plain glazed tiles of a greenish tone, then they were enriched with moldings and tracery, and lastly with relief tiles covered with figure subjects from the Old and New Testaments, coats of arms, mottoes and landscapes, sometimes all in one tone of color or polychrome, but with the incoming of the rococo and bizarre craze they became and have remained unsightly white glazed boxes.

The Russians, like the Germans, were makers of tile stoves, and some of their older ones are good both in color and design, Oriental in character, for the reason that they received the potter's art in part from Persia, India and Byzantium. Already in the tenth century the Russians were making tiles for walls and floors.

The German and Russian tile stoves are constructed on the same principle, although not confined to any particular form, shape or color among either people, both making them of hollow tiles, that is, hollow on the back, so as to expose a larger surface to the action of the fire, that the tiles may absorb a greater amount of heat and remain so heated for a longer period, radiating their heat slowly and at the same time utilizing it all.

The day is not far distant when stoves in this country will be made entirely of tiles and the frightful nickel-plated iron monster, so ugly in form and weak beyond expression in ornament, will be banished from our homes.

Stoves with us are now in a transition stage, the struggle between iron and earthenware has begun, between the common-place and the artistic, between the cheap and the ornate.



GERMAN TILE STOVE, SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

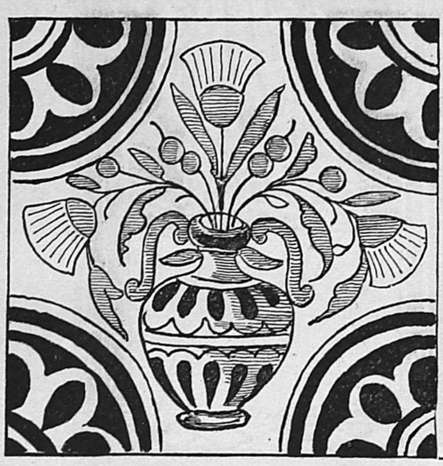
It is hard for the iron stove maker to give up his ugly darling that has brought so much money to him in the past, yet he cannot close his eyes to the fact that tiles are fast covering it up more and more from year to year, and that tile stoves are destined to drive the iron ones out of the market.

We have followed, step by step, the progress and extension of the art of tile making and the application of tiles for decorative and architectural purposes from a common center located between the Nile and the Indus, moreover we have seen how tiles were carried to the Far East by Buddhism and to the West by Mohammedanism, also to the West by another channel, the Germanic and Slavonic races; again that the tiles were mostly glazed and that the glaze was generally stanniferous, sometimes siliceous.

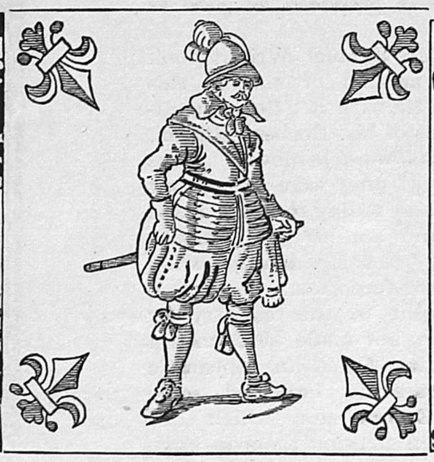
We now come to a tile that was largely influenced by all these channels, that is the Dutch tile, and yet no tile has a more marked character of its own. Those for walls are thin, quarter inch thick, five inches square, having a glazed surface on which is painted, usually in light blue or purple, some subject from holy scripture, or ships, tulips, etc., but all very crude yet quaint in design, here and there betraying a German, Spanish and Chinese or Japanese feeling.

So great was the use of tiles in Holland that the floors and walls of kitchens, dairies, and other rooms were lined with them, the furniture and stoves ornamented with them, and they were exported all over the world. The paving tiles are large, one inch thick and about eight inches square. As early as 1401 they were imported into England, and later Christ Church, Oxford and Hampton Court Palace were paved with these tiles in green and yellow.

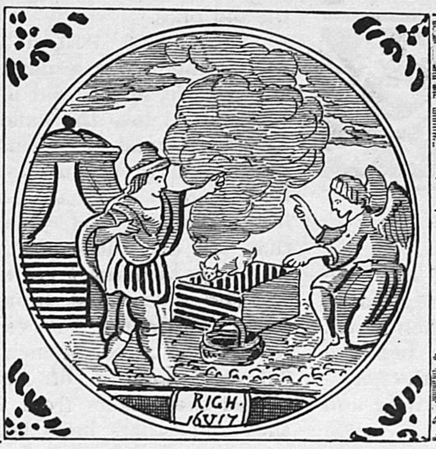
On the Dutch coming to America they brought



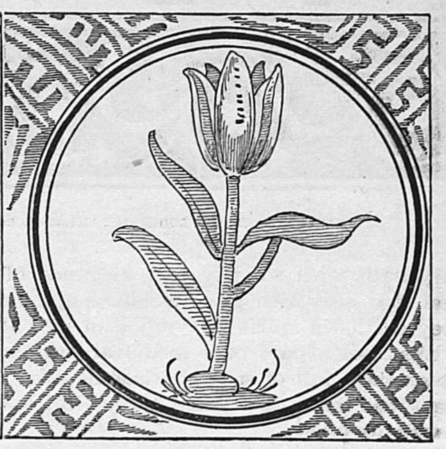
DUTCH TILE, SHOWING SPANISH INFLUENCE.



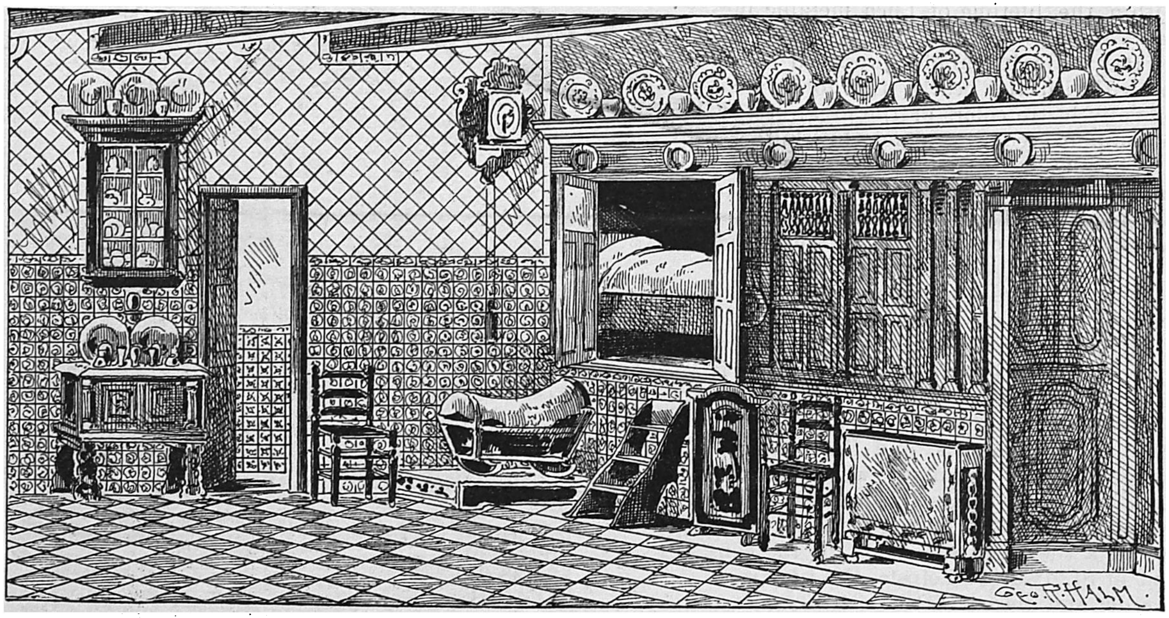
DUTCH TILE, SHOWING FRENCH INFLUENCE.



DUTCH SCRIPTURAL TILE.



DUTCH TILE, SHOWING JAPANESE INFLUENCE.



DUTCH TILED INTERIOR, FROM RACINET.

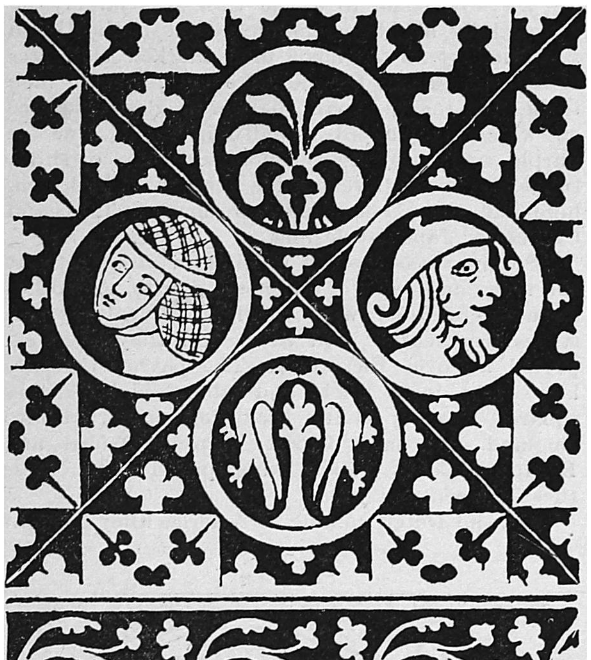
tiles for fireplaces with them, which are still to be seen in some of their houses in the neighborhood of New York, and in a few old houses at Newport—the Redwood and the Seixas mansions, where they are not only used in the fire-places, but also as mop-boards.

To-day tiles are made in Holland in just the same way as the old ones were, but the colors are not so soft or pleasing. The clay is prepared with great care, passed through a pugmill, is then roughly shaped into tiles by women and finished by men, left to dry under sheds and afterward in the sun, then fired in a kiln for the bisque, taken out glazed and fired, and finally the design painted on the face and the tile fired again.

The discovery in England (1752) of the art of printing a pattern on a tile from a copper plate did much to reduce the demand for and the sale of Dutch tiles; however, they are to be found in all the large tile markets of the world.

We now come to the consideration of the so-called Norman or, properly speaking, *inlaid encaustic tiles*, a kind used almost universally in France from the twelfth to the sixteenth century to pave the floors and wainscot the walls of churches, and, after the Conquest, for a like purpose in England.

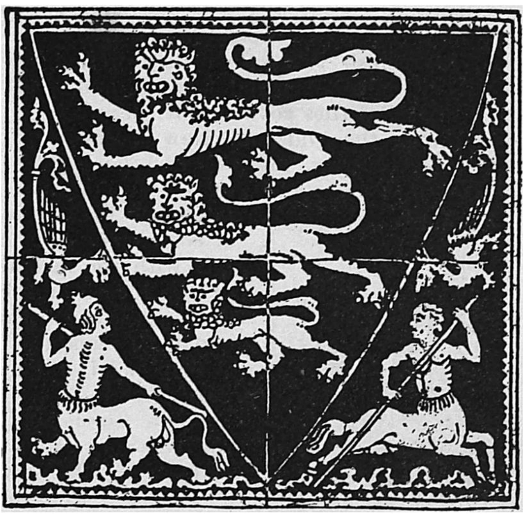
On the re-establishment of society under the Germanic races the Christian Church called on the faithful to build eccesiastical structures, in which her services could be carried out with solemnity. Almost at once on every hand stupendous and beautiful piles were erected, as their ruins to-day, so thickly scattered over Europe, attest. The acute and skillful architects of the middle ages not only built with solidity and elegance of composition, but also with great boldness and imagination they carried a spirit of symbolism into their work, so that not a part of a medieval church but had its symbols full of saintly wisdom—even the pavement was made to furnish symbolical learning and matter for study.



FRENCH ENCAUSIC FLOOR TILE, MEDIEVAL.

This spirit, no doubt, was the main mover in bringing into being *encaustic tiles*, the architect calling for some kind of a floor upon which he could write the mystic language of the time, inspired the potter with the idea that at last produced this kind of tile, with its inlay of symbols, monograms and escutcheons.

Just where and when they originated we cannot say, but their use became general throughout France and England during the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many of the large abbeys had kilns, in which they made tiles not only for their own use but for other religious houses. The most prevailing colors were red and yellow; the ground red and the design in yellow.



ENGLISH ENCAUSTIC FLOOR TILE, MEDIEVAL.

The tiles were made in this way: The potter took a wedge of clay, squared it, cut off a slab, batted it down and put it in a box, then pressed the pattern or die, which was in relief, down upon the face of the tile, indenting in this way the design upon the soft clay, afterward filling in the indentation with clay of another color, and then covering the face with slips of a light tint, allowing the tile to become hard; he at last, before firing, rubbed down the face until the pattern was revealed, and then, after drying for a number of days, the tile was fired, taken from the kiln, the surface dipped in glaze, and fired again; this finished the tile. With these tiles the medieval builder was able to make highly decorative pavements in harmony with the other parts of his edifice.

On the revival of Gothic architecture in England encaustic tiles came into use once more, but for a long time nothing was produced as good as the old ones.

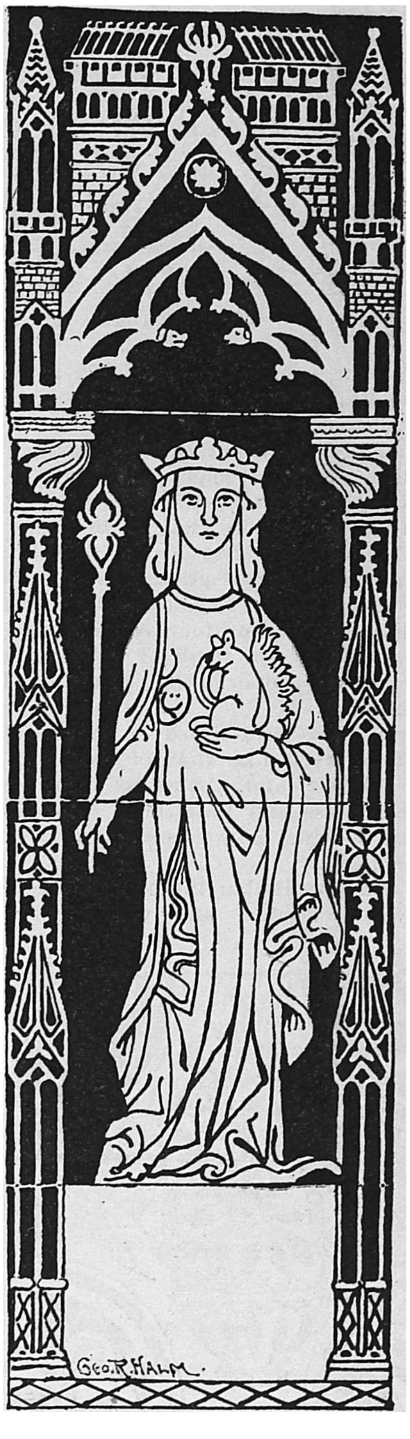
January 26, 1830, a Mr. Samuel Wright took out a patent for a new method of making this kind of tile, but he did little with it. Subsequently it passed into the hands of Mr. Herbert Minton, by whom wonderful results were achieved. Tiles fully equal to the medieval ones were turned out by this great tile maker, and to-day they are made in almost every tilery, and are now so common that the difficulties that beset Mr. Minton when he began to make them are forgotten.

They were first brought to this country by Mr. J. H. Coates, but were not made here until a short time ago, when the American Encaustic Tiling Company of Zanesville imported some skilled tile makers from Europe, since which time they and others have been making them in large numbers.

CAPACITY OF GLASS FOR ORNAMENT.

NEVER was the capacity of glass for ornament more fully illustrated than at the present time. We have white glass with designs incised in different subjects and decorated with gold outline paintings, ribs and spiral threads of opal on plain or colored surface, marbleized glass vases, irregular threads of colored glass, like crackled ware; lace patterns in enamel, white on blue, opal inner coatings covered with ruby, filigree raised work; vases in millefiori, showing the patterns in sections at the side; flake surfaces, with filigree spirally wound round bowls, with open filigree bottom painted in white enamel; fantastic ornaments, such as dragons on surfaces of vessels, arms of candelabra, with twisted ruby and vertical straight threads; mosaics for tables, in different colors; opalescent glass, decorated with mottled light ruby or rose colored leaves; mirrors, with frames of leaves and colored flowers in glass, and chandeliers of twisted branches of the same. Mosaic work finds at present free play in lamps of Arabic and other designs, as well as in windows. We notice a handsome combination in goblets, gilded up to a certain height and spiral ruby filigree, with opalescent horizontal threads. Hanging baskets are now made with perforated metallic frame, in which ruby glass has been blown.

AMBER.—Amber is coming into fashion as beads in embroidery and silk-knitted work. The delicate translucent tones of the best specimens afford a delightful play of light. The best amber is found along the coast of East and West Prussia. After northern high winds it is thrown up with the accumulations of sea-weed. The amber fishers, provided with nets, go up to their necks in water and draw it to the land. When a royal monopoly it was so strictly guarded that watchmen were stationed all along the coast, and the peasant who concealed any pieces was hung. Much amber is obtained in digging up the soil even at a considerable distance from the sea.



ENGLISH ENCAUSTIC WALL TILE.